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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 WARSAW 003794

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SUBJECT: NEW POLISH DEFMIN SIKORSKI HOPES TO VISIT  
WASHINGTON LATE NOVEMBER 2005

REF: (A) WARSAW 3734 (B) WARSAW 3694

Classified By: Ambassador Victor Ashe for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) SUMMARY. In his introductory meeting with Ambassador Ashe, new Defense Minister Radek Sikorski expressed his desire to visit Washington during the week of November 28 for official meetings with Secretary Rumsfeld and other senior officials. In a focused half-hour discussion, Sikorski also addressed plans for a post-inaugural visit to Washington by President-elect Lech Kaczynski in early 2006, the prospects for continued Polish deployments in Iraq, U.S. assistance for Polish defense transformation, and Poland's expected takeover of the ISAF lead in 2007. While not discounting the possibility of Polish troops' staying in Iraq, Sikorski stressed the difficult political decisions that the new government faced and the need for continued U.S. assistance. END SUMMARY.

Polish Senior Visits to the U.S.

2. (C) Ambassador Ashe paid an introductory call November 8 on Radoslaw "Radek" Sikorski, who was named Defense Minister in the Marcinkiewicz government on October 31 (Ref A). Following Ambassador's presentation of key U.S. priorities, including Iraq deployment, the U.S.-Polish strategic partnership, cooperative engagement in Ukraine, the discussion turned to the invitation President Bush had extended to Poland's future Foreign and Defense Ministers to visit Washington. Ambassador expressed his hope that Sikorski and newly named Foreign Minister Stefan Meller would visit their counterparts in Washington soon, in order to prepare for a meaningful visit post-inaugural visit to the U.S. by President-elect Kaczynski January/February 2006.

3. (C) Sikorski suggested two possible windows for his own visit, taking into account the projected Strategic Dialogue discussions in Poland in mid-December and the need to prepare his own substantive agenda. He preferred to visit November 30-December 2, as that would allow the discussions in Washington to feed into the new Polish government's decisions on Iraq deployment. However, December 19-21 would also be possible. Ambassador stressed that it would be very important for Sikorski to meet with Congressional leaders, who would already be out of session during the later time frame. Sikorski suggested that it might be possible for him to travel together with FM Meller, which might be "more effective in emphasizing certain themes and generating momentum for new policies," and undertook to consult with Meller on the timing of their travel.

Iraq Deployments in 2006

4. (C) Noting that Secretary Rumsfeld had praised the Polish contribution in Iraq in his November 7 congratulatory telephone call to Sikorski, Ambassador stressed the important role that Polish forces continued to play in Iraq and the U.S. hope that the GOP would at least maintain the current Polish troop level of 1400 through the end of 2006. Sikorski replied that the timing of the ongoing November 8-9 Multinational Division Center-South (MND-CS) Force Regeneration Conference (FRC) in Warsaw was unfortunate, since the new GOP had not yet been confirmed and the Cabinet would have to conduct a complete review of Poland's Iraq policy before making any commitments on future deployments. Absent the requisite political decision, any recommendations by the Polish military at the PRC could only be considered "provisional." Poland wanted to be a dependable and supportive ally that fulfills its commitments, but the Iraq deployment was nonetheless an issue of great concern to the Polish public and therefore warranted careful consideration. Ambassador expressed the hope that the GOP would consult with the U.S. privately and informally on any Iraq-related decisions before they were discussed publicly.

5. (C) Sikorski characterized the Iraq situation as a dilemma. On the one hand, the Polish military regards the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) in MND-CS,s sector as "almost ready" and is in the process of certifying brigades of the Iraqi Army's Eighth Division. Should the Iraqi military be able to take over security tasks in the sector, MND-CS,s mission could be considered a success and the Polish contingent could "hand off and say goodbye." On the other hand Polish forces could stay on the ground even after the

handover to ISF, at their current level but in a different capacity, serving as a training element and a "last resort" intervention contingent.

16. (C) Sikorski speculated that "more ambitious scenarios" might exist, but stressed that Poland could only consider them in the context of U.S. military assistance to Poland and "the broader bilateral relationship." According to Sikorski, Poland's military could only increase its support of the U.S. in Iraq if the costs of the additional deployment were offset. When Ambassador noted that the U.S. budgetary outlook was extremely tight in the wake of Hurricanes Katrina and Wilma, Sikorski replied that it wasn't "necessarily about more cash for next year" (2006). He said that the new government aimed to create a fully modern Polish Expeditionary Brigade by the end of its four-year term (2009) and U.S. assistance would be critical in achieving that goal.

17. (C) Sikorski commented briefly on his upcoming visit to Polish troops in Iraq (November 11-12, commemorating Polish Independence Day), saying that the Polish contingent's morale was high, having seen no Polish casualties in the past year and very few Iraqi civilian casualties in the MND-CS sector. He expressed concern about al-Sadr's increasing closeness to the Revolutionary Council, and mentioned that he fully relies on the advice of Amb. Ryszard Krystosik, the "Polish civilian adviser in Iraq."

Afghanistan, Ukraine  
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18. (C) Sikorski said that the GOP was prepared to assume command of the ISAF mission in Afghanistan in 2007 as scheduled, but stressed that Poland would need airlift support to deploy and sustain its force. He had told the German Ambassador earlier the same day that Poland would expect Germany to upgrade its staffing level at the NATO Multinational Corps, North-East (MNC-NE). Sikorski added that Denmark would also need to maintain its MNC-NE staffing level. (N.B. The Danish-German-Polish MNC-NE is projected to command the eleventh ISAF rotation, starting in August 2007, at which time Poland is scheduled to hold the rotating MNC-NE command). Sikorski said that Poland would seriously consider taking over a Provisional Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Afghanistan, but only after its ISAF command (i.e., Feb 2008). Sikorski briefly reminisced about his personal experiences in Afghanistan in the late 1980s, noting that he regards the current situation in Afghanistan on the whole as a success.

19. (C) Turning briefly to Ukraine, Sikorski said that Secretary Rumsfeld had asked for Polish support on NATO

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membership. He stated that "you don't have to push us, we'll push you" in helping move Ukraine toward European and Euro-Atlantic integration. He suggested one avenue might be to simultaneously assist both the Ukrainian and Polish militaries by upgrading the Polish-Ukrainian Battalion currently serving in Kosovo. Sikorski mentioned that he would like to visit Ukraine for his first official travel abroad (Ref B), but that he'd first have to decide whether the signal such a visit would send would be too strong (i.e., for Poland's eastern neighbors).

COMMENT  
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10. (C) Sikorski was clearly comfortable in the role of Defense Minister, and he took a markedly softer line than he had several weeks earlier with EUR DAS Mark Pekala on the link between continued Iraq deployment and desired increases in U.S. military assistance. Perhaps not surprisingly given his recent time living in Washington, Sikorski in his first days as DefMin has taken a more pragmatic view of U.S. relations than one might expect from other members of the newly formed government.

ASHE